



# Tribe missing from freeway group

## Gila River plans own panel

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The new version of the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team, which met Thursday for the first time since last spring, will not include Gila River Indian Community representation.

Of the four members who dropped out of the Arizona Department of Transportation group, three were representatives from the Gila River Indian Community just south of Ahwatukee Foothills.

Also missing from the new 18-member group is a representative from the United Dairymen of Arizona, although ADOT has asked the agricultural milk marketing cooperative to join the new group.

Pending invitations also have been extended to two new organizations, the Sierra Club and the South Mountain Village Planning Committee.

A spokeswoman for the Gila River Indian Community did not return a phone call seeking comment.

ADOT spokesman Doug Nintzel said the agency invited several GRIC council districts to join the reconstituted group but "they haven't responded with a member."

Late last year, the tribal council for the Gila River Indian Community passed a resolution to form a committee that would negotiate with ADOT over various freeway issues, including expanding Interstate 10 east of the community's land and possibly building the South Mountain Freeway on tribal land.

In the past, tribal leaders have refused to even study the possibility of the freeway being built on the reservation.

The reversal in official stance gave many freeway opponents their first glimmer of hope that Ahwatukee Foothills and, more specifically, the South Mountain Park would be spared the wrecking ball.

Under the current freeway design, construction workers would carve three large chunks up to 20 stories deep and more than two football fields wide out of the mountain.

ADOT also is considering building a possible tunnel through the mountain or gigantic bridge over it, although transportation officials have said the most likely plan is to cut a canyon allowing for five lanes of traffic in each direction.

Freeway foes object to both plans.

Tribal members and many non-members don't like any design that would destroy part of the preserve. The tribe considers the mountain sacred land.

The preserve, which features popular hiking and biking trails, is the largest municipal park in the country with more than 16,000 acres.

Freeway opponents wanted ADOT to drop members who represented several west Valley organizations because the west-side alignment has been decided.

ADOT, which picked 55th Avenue as its "preferred alignment" on the west, left it up to each organization on the original South Mountain citizens advisory group as to whether it wanted to continue being represented on the committee.

There will be a new representative from the Kyrene school district.

District spokeswoman Jennifer Grentz said Kyrene de los Lagos Elementary School Principal Tonya Yalung has a conflict of interest that prevents her serving on the committee.

Yalung's predecessor was on the initial 22-member CAT team as a representative of the school, which abuts Pecos Road and the proposed freeway.

Grentz said Kyrene still will have a place at the negotiating table. Terry Tatterfield, assistant superintendent for business and finance, will serve as the liaison between CAT and the district's governing board.